

Telephone Interview with COL (Ret) Eldon Carey by Richard Killblane on 18 June 2002.

Eldon Carey received his commission as a transportation officer through OCS in 1949. He served in Guam during the Korean War but joined C Co (APC), 23rd Transportation Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division after the war when it became a Pentomic Division.

Although Carey had been separated from his family a number of times, he was not pleased leave them for Vietnam. By 1969, the war focus under President Nixon had changed. We were no longer there to win the war. When he was there he saw other things that made him think that we did not do enough to win the war. We built a nice compound for the ARVN in Cam Ranh Bay. Had we done that for the rest of the ARVN, they might have fought harder to protect the good life. Nonetheless, he was a professional soldier and had his duty to perform.

He assumed command of the 24th Transportation Battalion at Cam Ranh Bay in 1969. The 24th Battalion was responsible for port clearance. It had 5ton tractors and trailers plus a company of Kenway trucks. The Kenways had big tires designed for driving over the desert and soft sand. Because they operated within the port compound, they worked 24 hours a day in two 12 hour shifts. Carey inherited this policy when he arrived. The port had an ammunition and cargo piers.

The 24th Battalion was subordinate to the 124th Transportation Command commanded by COL "Hammering Hank" Del Mar. Carey did not remember if the 500th Transportation Command was there at that time. Del Mar had a black deputy who he liked. The officer went on to make his star. Carey like many other officers did not like working for Del Mar.

LTC Ed Honor commanded the 36th Transportation Battalion at Cam Ranh Bay. Carey liked Honor. He was an outstanding officer. He was well organized and a good leader. Honor and his XO rode along on the convoys although they did not have to. Carey considered this very brave. Honor also had a good working relationship with Del Mar. "They were together on the fighting end and the funning end."

During that time, there was always more cargo that had to move than trucks to haul it. Del Mar pressured Carey that if a truck could roll it did. The only time they could shut down for maintenance was when they broke down. This was not an efficient method for maintaining vehicles.

Honor organized a maintenance program. He convinced Del Mar to let him schedule days for maintenance. His trucks made runs and did maintenance. Carey saw improvement in Honor's OR rate and admired him for it.

Annual Command Maintenance Inspections (CMI) did not stop because of the war. Carey did not think it was a good idea to inspect units, which could not shut down for maintenance. Fortunately, his battalion was not scheduled for a CMI until after he left.

He worried about how his battalion would perform. Maintenance was one area he wished he could have done better in. Honor went through a CMI and cajoled his inspectors.

After Del Mar assumed command of Cam Ranh Bay Support Command, he reorganized the commands. After six months in command, Carey moved up to be the Deputy Port Commander for the 124th Transportation Command under COL Rod Slaughterbeck. COL Tyree later replaced him. Del Mar did away with the 36th Battalion and consolidated the truck companies of the 36th into the 24th and gave Honor command of the 24th. Carey did not remember why Del Mar reorganized the command.

Carey had already come out on the colonel's promotion list. However, Del Mar wrote a letter to the board to remove another LTC's name from the colonel's promotion list.

The Deputy Port Commander scheduled the vessels for unloading. Carey did not remember any direction from the TMA. He brought ships in according to either the needs "up country" or the sequence that they arrived at port. His office kept a status board with the names of the vessels and the tonnage of their cargo. All terminal units at Cam Ranh Bay came under his authority.

Cam Ranh Bay was fired on several times but on one occasion while he was the Deputy Port Commander, they attacked the compound with rockets. One dud rocket hit the barracks and injured several soldiers with the splinters. After Carey left, he heard a Viet Cong sapper swam up to a vessel and blew hole in it. A guard then shot the sapper. Del Mar did not allow the guards to walk around with the magazines loaded in the weapons. He did not want any accidental discharges. The guards could only fire by making the deliberate act of loading their weapons.

While on Okinawa, he participated in Operation RED HAT to remove chemical rounds from Okinawa to Johnson Island. This resulted from turning Okinawa over to the authority of Japan. The original planner developed a plan and had the commander take it to the Pentagon and have it approved. The planner left before he could conduct the operation. COL Carey received the tasking to carry out the relocation of chemical rounds. He turned to Edward Ray, the chief of Okinawa stevedores. He was the most qualified man to make this work. He examined the plan and realized that it would not work. He asked for permission to rework it. He came up with a better way to load and haul the ammo requiring a Roll On/Roll Off vessel. Carey took the new plan to his boss who had already had the original plan approved by the Pentagon. He convinced the general to take the new plan back to the Pentagon and have it blessed instead. The operation was a success and the Army made a film of the relocation of the ammo.